

Jeannette Rankin

*National Statuary Hall Dedication
Washington, DC
May 1, 1985*

PLEASE RETURN



Photo by Tom McBride

JEANNETTE RANKIN WAS AMERICA'S FIRST congresswoman, elected to that office before most women even had the right to vote. She also was the only member of Congress to vote against U.S. entry into both world wars.

Born in territorial Montana, she belonged to a generation that saw in the West's vast spaces a range of possibilities far beyond what was imagined in the populous, stratified societies to the east. Part of that legacy was an egalitarianism between men and women, borne by the shared rigors and rewards of frontier life. Woman suffrage, after all, began in the West.

Her life and work spanned the early battles for the enfranchisement of American women and the emergence of modern feminism. She spoke out for equal pay for equal work, child protection laws and the rights of Butte miners. She voted against war in 1917 and again in 1941. In 1968, at age 88, she marched to protest the war in Vietnam.

Her life was occupied with politics, social change and, above all, a courageous tenacity to convictions that put principle above special interest. Her two great causes—women's rights and peace—were, in her mind, a single cause. "All my life, I have worked harder for freedom than the average person," she said, "but I knew that the first woman in Congress had to vote against war."

On May 1, 1985, a bronze statue of Jeannette Rankin will be placed in National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Montana's congressional delegation, Governor Ted Schwinden, members of the Rankin family and other dignitaries will dedicate the statue by Great Falls sculptor, Terry Mimnaugh. All Montanans are invited to attend the ceremony.

Each state may have two statues in the hall. The Rankin statue will join one of artist Charles M. Russell placed there several years ago. David E. Nelson, executive director of the Montana Arts Council, wrote, "It is most fitting that Montana is represented by an artist and by a national leader in the cause of peace and the equality of women, Jeannette Rankin. These are poignant statements about our values and concerns."

Individuals and representatives from various organizations have cooperated on public programs and activities honoring Rankin and the statue dedication. The League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Historical Society, Rankin family members, Governor's Office, Montana Arts Council, Missoula Women for Peace, Montana Arts Advocacy, National Organization of Women, Montana Women's History Project, members of the state's congressional delegation, professional women's and business groups and many others have worked to make the occasion memorable.

Educators are invited to help their students celebrate this important, historic event and encourage them to learn about Jeannette Rankin, a remarkable woman with a special place in the hearts of all Montanans.

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Information for Educators

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Jeannette Rankin in 1911, when she addressed the Montana Legislature to urge the passage of woman suffrage legislation in her state.



“It is not for myself that I am making this appeal, but for the six million women who are suffering for better conditions, women who should be working amid more sanitary conditions, under better moral conditions, at equal wages with men for equal work performed.”

—From 1911 speech before the Montana Legislature

A Life of Principle

Jeannette Rankin was born near Missoula on June 11, 1880—nine years before Montana Territory became a state. She was the eldest of seven children of John Rankin, a rancher and building contractor, and Olive Pickering Rankin, a teacher from New Hampshire.

After graduating from the University of Montana in 1902, she taught school near Missoula and in Whitehall. She then turned to social work, which took her to a San Francisco settlement house and later to classes at the New York School of Philanthropy. While working at a children's home in Spokane and later as a student in Seattle, she made her first acquaintance with the woman suffrage movement. In the fall of 1910, Washington voters would decide whether to give women the right to vote, and she eagerly volunteered to help the campaign.

After the successful Washington campaign, Rankin joined other campaigns for woman suffrage—organizing, speaking, distributing literature and becoming well versed in politics. In what was considered a bold move, she asked to address a joint session of the Montana Legislature in early 1911 to urge members to put the suffrage question on the ballot in her home state. Although many treated her appearance as a novelty, her speech was effective. The measure failed by a narrow margin, yet she had made suffrage an issue in Montana.

Her work for the national movement brought her in contact with Alice Paul, Harriet Laidlaw and other prominent suffragists whose goals went beyond voting rights to include equal pay for equal work, equal access to jobs and education and other civil rights. By 1913 only five states—all in the West—had made that first inroad by granting women the vote, and it had been a slow process. (Wyoming, as the first state to give women the vote, had done so in 1869.) Rankin worked vigorously with her colleagues to effect legislation in other states. In the National Woman Suffrage Association's parade in Washington, D.C. in 1913, she led the Montana delegation.

That same year, as chair of the Montana State Suffrage Committee, she canvassed on behalf of woman suffrage. The powerful Anaconda Copper Company, the dominant influence in Montana politics, government and media, was decidedly if not overtly anti-suffragist, fearful that women's concerns about working conditions in its mines would lead to passage of labor laws benefiting workers. Despite this formidable opponent, she appealed directly to the people with the simple logic and articulation that typified her throughout her public life.

Belle Fligelman Winestine of Helena, her aide and herself a pioneer suffragist, recalls one of

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Montana Historical Society

Montana's congresswoman, 1917. One of her first votes was a vote against U.S. entry into World War I.

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“I have always felt that there was more significance in the fact that the first woman who was ever asked what she thought about war said NO.”

Rankin's speeches during the campaign. "She had a marvelous personality—as soon as she came out, the air was electric. She told her audience, 'You shouldn't have to tell men why you want to vote. Men don't tell you why *they* want to vote. They vote because it's right to vote.' "

In November 1914, Montana women were given the right to vote and, as architect of the victory, Rankin became a national figure in the campaign for women's rights.

It was not so much her success in the suffrage campaign as her concern for world peace that encouraged Rankin to seek public office in 1916. To her, working for peace was a natural extension of working for women's rights, as she felt most women were against war. With Europe in conflict and the U.S. holding to a tenuous neutrality, she felt action was needed. She would run for Montana's congressman at large.

The idea was met with skepticism. Some suggested that she seek a less conspicuous post, and one person urged her brother, Wellington, to "keep Jeannette from making a fool of herself." Wellington knew that his sister could win the seat, but nevertheless was "shocked at the prejudice that exists against a woman going to Congress."

Although the prospects seemed unfavorable, Rankin was the best known person in the state, aside from the governor, and an avid campaigner. Montana women would support her, hoping that a woman in Congress would expedite a federal constitutional amendment for equal franchise. That hope became her platform's main plank. She also promised to support legislation for peace, child welfare, improved working conditions for women and other social reforms.

The voters chose Jeannette Rankin over her opponent in November 1916. Montana was sending a woman to Congress, while in most states, women were still denied the right to vote.

Although she intended to be a working member of government rather than a symbol, the eyes of America were upon her. She represented all that women had worked so hard to achieve and the first measure of what they could do in the future. Her actions and behavior would set the pace.

Jeannette Rankin immediately showed that she was easily the peer of her colleagues. Louis Levine, professor of economics at the University of Montana, wrote in the *New York Times*:

There is a great surprise in store for the members of the new Congress when they convene in Washington...and meet their first woman colleague, 'The Lady from Montana.' They will have to throw overboard a lot of mental baggage which they have valued very highly for many years. They

will find in their midst not that impulsive, irrational, sentimental, capriciously thinking and obstinately feeling being which many imagine women to be, but a strong and well-balanced personality, scientifically trained, accustomed to strict reasoning, well versed in the art of politics, inspired by high social ideals, tempered by wide experience.

Her principles were tested immediately, as President Woodrow Wilson called a special session for Congress to decide on U.S. entry into World War I. As the person to unite American women, she was torn between pro- and anti-war factions within the suffrage movement; an unpopular, divisive vote could mean the loss of momentum for women's rights. Her brother, Wellington, urged her to vote "a man's vote"; others told her she would never be re-elected if she voted against war. To this she responded, "Never for one second could I face the idea that I would send young men to be killed for no other reason than to save my seat in Congress."

When the roll call came, she rose and said, "I want to stand by my country but I cannot vote for war. I vote no."

Throughout her 1917-1919 term, she worked for child welfare laws, equal employment practices, health education and civil service reform. She supported the Butte miners by calling for safe working conditions and the workers' right to organize.

In 1917 Congress addressed a resolution to give women the vote. Largely because of her efforts, the resolution passed the House. Although it then failed in the Senate, it succeeded the following year. By 1920 two-thirds of the states had ratified the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote.

After an unsuccessful bid for re-election, Rankin turned to pacifist concerns. In 1919 she was a delegate to the Women's International Conference for Permanent Peace. In the 1920s she worked on National Consumers League campaigns for health education, workers' compensation, factory reform and laws against child labor. She bought a small farm in Georgia, with easy access for lecture tours and lobbying trips to Washington.

By the 1930s, her pacifist views had taken shape as a personal philosophy with one goal: the abolition of war as a means to settle international disputes. In 1929 she joined the National Council for the Prevention of War, the most active group of peace activists in the U.S., and remained with it for the next nine years.

At age 59, she decided to run for Congress again and began to travel about her district to introduce herself to a new generation of Montanans. Her platform was simple: world peace.

By 1941, when she began a second term in Congress, other women had served in public office. However, one thing had not changed since

1917: Congress again would decide if the country should enter a major war. Rankin pushed legislation that would put the issue of declaring war in a national referendum. But with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, sentiment ran to a near frenzy in favor of sending U.S. troops into the conflict.

The vote was taken: 388 for war, 1 against. The single vote was Jeannette Rankin of Montana, again voting her conscience. A member of the state's Republican National Committee begged her to change her vote to "redeem Montana's honor." She replied that she couldn't understand that her state's honor was so weak that it could only be revived by the shedding of blood.

When her term came to an end in 1943, she returned to Montana. From there she traveled a great deal, including several trips to India, home of Ghandi, whose views on nonviolence and peace she greatly admired.

In the late 1960s, nearly 90 years old, she once again became involved in peace activism. This time, with an undeclared war in Vietnam and an aroused American conscience, thousands of others joined her protest. In 1968 she led the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in a march on Washington, D.C. against the Vietnam war. She continued her lecture tours and appearances throughout the period. Biographer Hannah Josephson writes, "The program of three months' activities in 1972 shows Jeannette Rankin at the age of 92 moving at almost the same velocity as Jeannette Rankin when running for Congress" at age 34.

In 1971 she was named the first member of the Susan B. Anthony Hall of Fame. In her acceptance speech, she said, "We are here together to work for the elimination of war...My dream has always been that women would take this responsibility."

She died in 1973.

About the Artist

The bronze statue of Jeannette Rankin destined for National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., is by Great Falls sculptor, Terry Mimnaugh.

Mimnaugh was born and raised in the West and graduated from Montana State University with a degree in fine arts. In a national competition, she was selected to create a heroic bronze statue of Jeannette Rankin, which was placed in Montana's Capitol in Helena in 1980. Other commissions include work for the Boy Scouts of America, State Fair Collection and sculptures of children as part of an art scholarship fund raising project for Great Falls Public Schools.

In 1984 she received the Judge's Award of Excellence in the Great Falls Juried Show and the Judge's Purchase Award, Montana Institute of the Arts.

Teaching Ideas

These activities may be adapted to different levels.

☐ After viewing a video (see *Resources*) or reading about Jeannette Rankin, students may dress up as Rankin at different periods in her life and tell or act out an appropriate event. Some students can play the roles of the people who influenced her. The scenes can be a "living biography" presentation for another class, the school or community group.

☐ Have students write poetry about Jeannette Rankin. A cinquain would be one form, with her name as the first of five lines.

☐ Discuss political campaigns and some of the important issues when Jeannette Rankin ran for Congress. Students may design a button or campaign brochure which candidate Rankin could use.

☐ After studying transportation in Montana in the 1910s, '20s and '30s, divide students into groups. One group is her campaign advisor for her first congressional term (1917-1919), the other for her second term (1941-1943). Make plans for traveling the state, with distances to cover, transportation used, agendas, etc. Compare the two trips. (This activity needs research, but is challenging.)

☐ Have students write a letter as one of Jeannette Rankin's constituents supporting or opposing one of her political stands. Exchange the letters and write a response from the congresswoman's point of view. Some issues she supported in her first congressional term (1917-1919) were:

1. Protecting copper miners by government control
2. Increased pay for postal workers
3. Appropriation of funds for the Flathead Irrigation Project
4. Sale of seed grain to farmers
5. Federal farm loans
6. Increasing the allowance of soldiers' wives with children
7. Improving the wages and working conditions of women in the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing
8. Women workers and food conservation
9. Woman suffrage

☐ Invite an older person to class—someone who was a voter when Rankin was elected to Congress in the early 1940s. How did this person feel about her vote against U.S. entry into

World War II? Does he/she remember other issues Rankin supported or opposed? This activity also may be done through individual student interviews and a comparison of the results.

☐ Tying the activity to a Montana or U.S. history unit of the appropriate periods, ask students to determine the characteristics of

Montana and the West, as well as Rankin's own family—characteristics which allowed her to develop the qualities and convictions she exhibited.

☐ Use the Rankin quotes herein or in other resources to stimulate student activities.



Montana Historical Society

Jeannette Rankin, pioneer feminist, holding a suffrage banner during the Montana suffrage campaign (ca. 1912-1914).

☐

"The suffrage campaign created my abiding faith in the power of free peoples to determine the course of their lives."



Resources

* Available at the library of the Montana Historical Society, Helena.

† Appropriate for juvenile levels.

BOOKS

†Block, Judy R. *The First Woman in Congress: Jeannette Rankin*. New York: Contemporary Perspectives, 1978.

Dykeman, Wilma. *Too Many People, Too Little Love: Edna Rankin McKinnon, Pioneer for Birth Control*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974.

*Giles, Kevin. *Flight of the Dove: The Story of Jeannette Rankin*. Beaverton, Oregon: Touchstone Press, 1980.

*Josephson, Hannah. *First Lady in Congress: Jeannette Rankin*. New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1974.

*Paladin, Vivian and Jean Baucus. *Helena: An Illustrated History*. Norfolk and Virginia Beach, Virginia: Donning Co., 1983. (Includes photo of Rankin statue by Terry Mimnaugh.)

*Richey, Elinor. *Eminent Women of the West*. Berkeley: Howell-North, 1975. (Includes chapter, "Jeannette Rankin—Woman of Commitment.")

*†White, Florence Meiman. *First Woman in Congress: Jeannette Rankin*. New York: Julian Messner, 1980.

PERIODICALS

Editors. "Woman Against War," *Newsweek*, February 14, 1966.

Filer, Bertha. "Our First Woman Congressman," *McCall's*, April 1917.

*Harris, Ted C. "Jeannette Rankin in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Spring 1974, Vol. LVIII, No. 1, pp. 55-77

Kennedy, John F. "Three Women of Courage," *McCall's*, January 1958.

Montana: The Magazine of Western History:**

Board, John C. "The Lady from Montana," July 1967, Vol. XVII, No. 3, pp. 2-17.

Larson, T.A. "Montana Women and the Battle for the Ballot," January 1973, Vol. XXIII, No. 1

Wilson, Joan Hoff. "'Peace is a woman's job. . . '—Jeannette Rankin and The Origins," January 1980, Vol. XXX, No. 1, pp. 28-41.

Wilson, Joan Hoff. "'Peace is a woman's job . . . '—Jeannette Rankin and Her Lifework," April 1980, Vol. XXX, No. 2, pp. 38-53.

Winestine, Belle Fligelman. "Mother Was Shocked," July 1974, Vol. XXIV, No. 3.

**Back issues are available at the Montana Historical Society's Publications Office.

Rankin, Jeannette. "What We Women Should Do," *Ladies Home Journal*, August 17, 1917.

Rostad, Phil. "Jeannette Rankin, the Lady from Montana," *Montana Historian*, Autumn 1972.

Winestine, Belle Fligelman. "The Compleat Feminist: 1919—A Conversation With Belle Winestine," *Northern Lights*, January 1985, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 9-12.

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

*Board, John C. "The Lady From Montana: Jeannette Rankin," Master's thesis, University of Wyoming, Laramie, 1964.

Harris, Ted C. "Jeannette Rankin, Warring Pacifist," Master's thesis, University of Georgia, Athens, 1969.

_____. "Jeannette Rankin: Suffragist, First Woman Elected to Congress, and Pacifist," PhD dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens, 1972.

Lindquist, Adah Donovan. "A Study of Jeannette Rankin and Her Role in the Peace Movement," Honors paper, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, 1972.

*Oral History Project. *Jeannette Rankin Transcript*, Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, University of California, n.d.

Schaffer, Ronald. "Jeannette Rankin, Progressive Isolationist," PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1959.

Ward, Doris Buck. "Winning of Woman Suffrage in Montana," Master's thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, 1974.

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Joyce Hill Scrapbook (concerned with Rankin's life; includes photographs). University of Georgia Archives, Athens, Georgia.

Jeannette Rankin Papers. Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

Jeannette Rankin Papers. National Council for Prevention of War Files, Swarthmore Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

Jeannette Rankin Papers. Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

*Wellington D. Rankin Papers. Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

VIDEOTAPES

Jeannette Rankin: The Woman Who Voted No. Produced by Ron Bayly and Susan Cohen Regele, Light Bound Productions, for KUED-TV, Salt Lake City public television, in cooperation with Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

Available in all video formats from the Audiovisual Library, Office of Public Instruction, State Capitol, Helena, MT 59620 (1-800-332-3402). Also available through the Montana Committee for the Humanities from Instructional Materials Services, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812.

Video, University of Georgia Extension Service, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

MISCELLANEOUS

Many interviews, oral histories, newspaper articles, congressional materials, etc., are available for research purposes. For sources, see the bibliographies in the above books, manuscripts and documents.



Jeannette Rankin on Suffrage and Peace

"We did not labor in suffrage just to bring the vote to women, but to allow women to express their opinions and become effective in government. Men and women are like right and left hands: it doesn't make sense not to use both."

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"The American woman must be bound to American obligations not through her husband's citizenship, but through her own, directly."

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"If the hogs of the nation are 10 times more important than the children, it is high time that women should make their influence felt."—Criticism of a \$300,000 federal appropriation to study fodder for hogs, while only \$30,000 was appropriated for a study of children's needs (1916).

□

"Small use will it be to save democracy for the race if we cannot at the same time save the race for democracy."

Others on Jeannette Rankin

"This woman has more courage and packs a harder political punch than a regiment of regular-line politicians."—New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, 1917

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"She is...a saver with a great heart, a builder, a trailblazer and an example to all legislators who would have the courage of their convictions."—Montana Senator Lee Metcalf

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"Your dauntless courage as a leader for equal rights for women and a champion of peace have immortalized you in the hearts of millions at home and abroad. It has been a privilege to support your efforts and to have my efforts supported by so great a woman. You have brought honor to yourself, America and womanhood."—Coretta Scott King on Jeannette Rankin's 90th birthday.

□

"She was a remarkable woman who has left her imprint upon history and who strove consistently to achieve a more peaceful world. We will miss her, but she has made her contribution and she will be remembered for decades to come."—Montana Senator Mike Mansfield